DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 410 621 CS 509 587

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TITLE A Communication Competency Assessment Framework: A Literature Review of Communication Competency and Assessment.
INSTITUTION Northwest Regional Educational Lab., Portland, OR.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE 1997-09-04
NOTE 39p.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Communication Research; *Communication Skills; Elementary Secondary Education; Evaluation Methods; High Risk Students; Higher Education; Literature Reviews; Models; Research Needs
IDENTIFIERS *Communication Competencies

ABSTRACT

This paper provides a synthesis of literature related to communication competency and assessment. The paper concludes that pieces of the communication competency puzzle are scattered all across the communication field--some pieces fit together, others do not. It also asserts that no one in the field has "the picture on the box"--the ultimate guiding framework for assessing communication competency. The paper proposes the CREATE (Content, Relationship, Effectiveness, Appropriateness, and Transactional Effectiveness) framework based on foundational work at the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory involving a trait approach for reading and writing assessment. Initial reviews of the proposed framework by other communication scholars and professionals has been constructive and encouraging; a number of pilot projects has been planned (including applications for "at-risk" students and applications for the development of critical thinking) to further test the model. Contains 100 references and 3 tables outlining aspects and applications of the CREATE framework. (RS)

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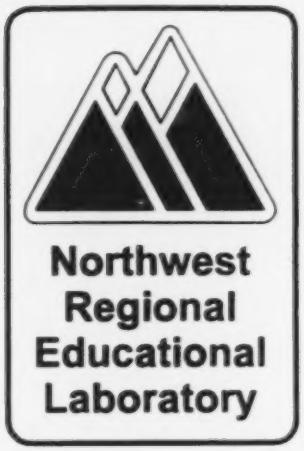

A Communication Competency Assessment Framework: A Literature Review of Communication Competency and Assessment

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INTRODUCTION

Communication research has suggested that students spend the majority of their school day engaged in speaking and listening activities (Arter, 1989; Carbol, 1986; Devine, 1982). According to the Oregon Department of Education, students spend up to 45 percent of their time listening, 30 percent of their time speaking, 16 percent in reading, and 9 percent in writing (1987). Using a dramatic comparison, the National Communication Association (NCA) claims students listen to the equivalent of a book a day; talk the equivalent of a book a week; read the equivalent of a book a month; and write the equivalent of book a year" (1996, p.2).

Without question, speaking and listening activities are fundamental components of the educational process. For some students in particular, the opportunity to develop speaking and listening competence and confidence may be crucial in terms of overall academic success. As an example, research related to communication apprehension suggests that approximately 20 percent of the population has such a high degree of communication apprehension that even if they are at great disadvantage in personal relationships, educational environments, career attainments, etc., they will still try to avoid oral communication (Allen, 1986). Yet research has also suggested that through practice and study, communication anxiety can be reduced and speaking and listening abilities can be improved (Speech Communication Association, 1996; Rubin, Rubin and Jordan, 1997). In addition, having an opportunity to develop competence and confidence in oral communication skills may have a positive effect on outcomes for at-risk students (Chesebro, 1992). Further, the way in which speaking and listening skills are developed as a part of the educational process have life-long implications. "Adequate oral

communication frequently determines an individual's educational, social, and vocational success" (Arter, 1989, p.1).

Unfortunately, regardless of its importance or the amount of time students spend engaged in listening and speaking activities, recent studies report that a large percentage of people are not developing adequate oral communication skills (Barnes and Hayes, 1995; Vangelisti and Daly, 1989). As summarized by the National Communication Association (1996, p.2):

- Nearly 20 percent of the nation's young people cannot accomplish any of the simplest [oral] communication tasks, including relaying specific information, giving instructions, recounting details, defending personal opinions, [or] developing a persuasive argument;
- Sixty-three percent [of young people] cannot give clear oral directions;
- Ninety-five percent of the population reports some degree of anxiety about communicating with a person or in groups; and
- Adults [typically] listen at a 25 percent level of efficiency.

Other research suggests that minority status (Vangelisti and Daly, 1989) and socioeconomic status (Daly, 1994) also may put students at a disadvantage with regard to developing competence and confidence in oral communication within the educational environment.

Given the proportion of educational activities involving oral communication, the life-long implications of adequate oral communication skills, and the alarming results of recent national assessment studies, it is not surprising that school districts across the nation have been mandated to more purposefully address the development of speaking and listening skills through classroom instruction. Though the language may differ from state to state or from district to district, typically the communication competency standards that

have been established are similar to those outlined by the NCA. Those competencies suggested by the NCA imply an ability to:

- Communicate effectively in a variety of situations and contexts (e.g. interpersonal, group, public, etc.) with varying degrees of required formality;
- Use verbal and nonverbal behavior to communicate meaning;
- Use critical thinking skills as a part of listening and problem-solving;
- Communicate with a purpose (e.g. expressive, informative, persuasive, etc.); *and*
- Effectively participate through communication as a member of society beyond the classroom.

In essence, if these competency standards are met, students will have developed communication skills which will better equip them for critical thinking and fuller participation as life-long learners in a global community.

While the growing interest in the development of communication competency through education does indicate an awareness of its importance, the consequential challenge of assessing competency must be addressed before real improvement can be measured. Optimally, assessment will drive instruction. "Assessments can be a significant tool in the instructional process, one that can demystify the learning process...[and] can also become a tool for learning in and of themselves; students can learn something from doing them" (Arter, 1996, p.1). Unfortunately, little agreement currently exists among scholars in the evolving field of communication as to what communication competency actually looks like (Meade, 1997). Without a clear picture of competency in mind – without clear and appropriate assessment tools, students and teachers have historically been expected to put together a communication competency puzzle without the advantage

of a picture on the puzzle box – without a clearly defined organizing framework to guide them.

With the need for a clearly defined organizational framework in mind, the focus of this paper will be to: provide a brief overview of communication assessment challenges and approaches; provide a synthesis of what is agreed upon among scholars with regard to the notion of communication competency; and propose a conceptual framework grounded in research which may be useful in informing learning and instruction.

CHALLENGES AND APPROACHES

As an evolving field, little agreement has existed among speech professionals concerning how to accurately assess communication competency (Bostrom, 1990). If those in the communication field are still in the process of resolving this issue, then it could be expected that "the place of speech communication as a discipline in American Education has never been universally understood, appreciated, or accepted (Taylor, 1989, p.3).

One common misunderstanding about communication has included the belief that speaking and listening are separate dimensions of communication -- rather than interrelated dimensions (Richard, 1993). The problem with this view is that by "focusing on only one element of the communication context in isolation provides a distorted picture of the complexities of communication" (Hugenberg and Yoder, 1994, p.3). Take for instance a study reported by Beal and Flavell (1983) where children who observed communication between a speaker and listener "blamed" the listener for not understanding the message rather than recognizing that both the speaker and listener had a responsibility for creating mutual understanding. If learning is reinforced through the assessment

process (Arter, 1996), then assessing listening as a separate dimension outside a natural communication context continues to reinforce such distortions in thinking and behaving.

Another common assumption has been the belief that communication – listening and speaking skills – should be automatic because students can already hear and talk when they come to school (NCA, 1996). Anecdotally the author of this paper, a former college speech communication instructor, can recall with some amazement how many times students resisted taking a required speech communication class based on the argument that they already knew how to communicate because "they had been doing it all their lives." By the end of the term, however, these same students would often exclaim that until they had taken the course, they had no idea communication (speaking and listening) was something that one could actually learn. As research suggests, it is likely that these students did not receive much, if any prior formal communication instruction (McCaleb, 1979; Roberts, 1985). If, in earlier settings students were not instructed in communication skills but were still assessed for speaking and listening competencies, then logically, what was reinforced was the belief that their skills were inherent and could be clinically measured—analogous, perhaps, to taking occasional blood samples— in that something was being done to the students where they had little control over the outcome.

Assumptions about oral communication have been reflected in different assessment approaches. For example, listening or speaking competencies may be assessed through a paper and pencil approach. Whether it is the appropriate approach, however, would depend on what domain of learning was actually being assessed. "Defining the domain of knowledge, skills, or attitudes to be measured is at the core of any assessment" (Mead and Rubin, 1985, p.1). If, for example, knowledge or attitudes about communication were to

be assessed, a paper and pencil approach might be very appropriate; however, it would not be appropriate to use paper and pencil approaches when assessing skill levels. Instead, skill levels, according to the National Communication Association (1996) , need to be assessed through actual performance.

While using a performance assessment may be most appropriate for measuring speaking and listening skills (as opposed to knowledge or attitudes), the way in which this approach is understood may also affect appropriateness. One approach to performance assessment has involved attempts to measure discrete listening or speaking abilities at a particular point in time. One of the disadvantages involved in this approach to performance assessment is that it tends to be artificial and does not take into account the fact that students have good and bad days that affect how well they might perform (NCA, 1994).

The use of the "artificial" performance assessment approach – an approach outside the natural experience of the students – has been challenged in research and practice (Arter, 1989; NCA,1994). Rather than viewing communication assessment as the discrete measuring of specific speaking or listening abilities at a particular point in time, current literature and practice stresses communication assessment as a process over a period of time and across different situations (Farr, 1994; NCA, 1996; Spandel, 1988). Rather than assess students under artificial circumstances, the assessment of "authentic" communication experiences is currently being stressed in assessment literature (Arter, 1989; Kansas State Communication Association, 1994; NCA, 1996). An "authentic" assessment might involve, among other criteria: the use of natural or spontaneous oral language for assessing listening skills (Plattor, 1986); an opportunity for a variety of

acceptable responses (NCA, 1996); a recognition of the interrelationship between speaking and listening (O'Hair,1997), consideration of both verbal and nonverbal dimensions of communication (NCA, 1996); and the use of assessment for feedback (NCA, 1996).

Even though philosophically there appears to be a growing agreement for "authentic" communication assessments, one of the major implementation challenges involved concerns what it is that will actually be assessed. While specific indicators used to assess communication competencies in different contexts are fairly consistent (e.g. *speaker uses adequate volume; content of message is supported by facts and examples; listener asks questions and paraphrases for understanding; speaker uses appropriate language for the audience, etc.*) , a review of literature suggests the general frameworks for assessing students' communication competence across and in different contexts vary. For example, a guide, which was prepared by the Illinois State Board of Education in 1989, uses a list of skill areas as a framework for speaking assessments in different contexts. These include: *clear and expressive speaking; orderly presentation of ideas; development of ideas; use of appropriate language and nonverbal cues; and communicating for a variety of purposes.* A different list of skills was provided for the assessment of listening which include: *developing meaning; structuring information; drawing inferences; distinguishing among purposes; identifying points of view; and providing effective and appropriate responses.*

Camas School District in the State of Washington, on the other hand, is using a language arts framework which allows students to engage in different kinds of communication acts for different purposes which include: *imagining, sharing feeling,*

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informing, controlling, and ritualizing. Within each communication purpose, the student should be able to demonstrate different kinds of communication skills. When a student engages in the communication act of *ritualizing*, he or she has an opportunity to demonstrate knowledge of social rules and culturally appropriate communication. When a student is involved in *informing*, behaviors might include stating information, questioning, justifying, etc. The Camas framework appears to be an integration of speaking and listening assessments (Camas District #117, 1996).

The Illinois and Washington assessment frameworks are just two examples of variations among approaches. Unless a more global definition of communication competency is uniformly used, these variations are to be expected. The question now arises: Within the communication field, are there any more generally accepted, global characteristics of communication competency which would be useful in assessments? Are there sense-making " thinking frames" (Thompson, 1997) which would enable learners to better understand and develop communication competencies as life-long learners? Is there a way to organize or "frame" the agreed upon indicators of competency in such a way that learners will be able have a common language for critical thinking and discussion about the communication process?

COMMUNICATION COMPETENCY

G.M. Phillips, claimed,"...defining competence is like trying to climb a greased pole: Every time you think you have it, it slips." Phillips' comment reflects the many divisions among communication theorists as to how competency should be defined – little agreement actually exists (Backlund, 1990; Daly, 1983; Hugenberg and Yoder, 1994; McCroskey, 1985; Meade, 1997; Rubin and Graham, 1986). McCroskey (1985) sees the

positional division on competency split into two groups – those who believe competency resides in the individual across situations and those who see competency as situation-bound. The trait view assumes that individuals who are communicatively competent will behave consistently across situations (McCroskey, 1985). The situation-bound view assumes that competency can vary from one situation to another (Rubin and Graham, 1986; Sptizberg, 1983).

Others have argued that competent communication is more a matter of knowledge while still others assert that it is a matter of demonstrated performance. Claim Hugenberg and Yoder (1994), "competence is most commonly defined from an action perspective – performance of specific communication skills – the more skillfully the message is encoded and decoded, the more competent the communicator..." (p.3).

Though differences vary in terms of degree, theorists generally agree that competence encompasses the cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains as identified in Bloom's taxonomy of learning (Cegala, 1983; Chesebro, 1992; McCroskey, 1985; Meade, 1997; Pearson and Daniels, 1988; SCA, 1996). Some agreement also exists regarding the interrelatedness of the cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains (Duran, 1982; Rubin, 1983; Spitzberg, 1983). As Brian Spitzberg suggested, the distinction "...is indeed important because performance can be enhanced or inhibited by any one or all of these components" (1983, p.324).

Given the position that to some degree the different learning domains are important interrelated components of communication competency, how would they be manifested in terms of observable characteristics for assessment purposes? To explore this question, it will be useful to consider the most widely accepted model of communication

which is transactional in nature. Rather than viewing a communication encounter as a speaker sending a message to a receiving listener, the transactional model views sending and receiving as occurring simultaneously for both (or all) parties involved (Infante, 1993; Devito, 1994). This model implies that communication competence is a "mutually created, non-linear, socially constructed event among interdependent interactants " (Hugenberg & Yoder, 1994, p.7). The model reflects communication as a relationship rather than simply communication acts transmitted back and forth among participants. With regard to that relational aspect of communication, "...the nature of the relationship we have with another person has a strong influence on the communication process..." (Kelley, Phillips, and Keaton, 1995, p.51).

The transactional model also implies that oral communication, unlike written communication, is "in a state of constant change" (Devito, 1994). While this model stresses the co-orientation of communication (Infante, et al, 1993), it further implies that individual communicators have a responsibility to be aware that their communication is interactive and involves choices in terms of appropriate communication strategies. "...speakers and listeners coordinate their use of conversational strategies (e.g. questions or pauses) to co-construct the conversational references on which they rely for mutual understanding" (Richard, 1993, p.388).

As the interactive nature of competence is widely accepted, communication competency assessment must consider both the learned skills or traits of the individual and the shared interaction within a given situation. Based on earlier research, for example, Cegala and Sillars (1989) suggest a competency trait involving a communicator's involvement toward communication which would include an integration of "thoughts,

feelings, and behaviors with the on-going interaction. He or she considers the meaning of circumstances as they arise in conversations and responds to them accordingly" (p.38). If a competent communicator is one who skillfully uses various communication strategies as indicated by circumstances within communication situations, an inept communicator would be one who was not flexible in their strategies within different situations. "...most inept speakers [communicators] simply do not observe their listener and consequently are unaware of feedback (Kelley, 1995, p.181).

Even though the model of transactional communication is broadly accepted in the communication field, whether or not the transactional nature refers specifically to interactions within a communication situation or across communication situations as well is not clear from literature. For example, the term "behavioral flexibility" in relation to the audience could be viewed as a characteristic or trait of a competent communicator. However, whether behavioral flexibility refers to a communicator's adaptability to situations or relationships within situations or both is not evident. Martin and Rubin (1990) asserted, "...behavioral flexibility are the behavioral adaptations they make from situation to situation. A key notion is the ability to adapt to [within] the situation"(p.3). From communication assessment literature, a couple examples of indicators reflecting the transactional nature of communication include: ability to adapt to changes in a setting (Arter, 1992); and seeking and applying feedback (Washington Department of Education, 1997).

Defining communication competency in terms of distinguishable traits has been particularly challenging because of the interrelated nature of the different components involved. Another interrelated trait or characteristic suggested in literature as a hallmark of

competency is "appropriateness." Appropriateness does relate again to a communication relationship but also puts more emphasis on competency across situations rather than within situations. Appropriateness refers to avoiding violations of situational or relational rules (Kelley, Phillips, and Keaton, 1995; Meade, 1997; Rubin, 1991). It also involves what others deem socially appropriate or acceptable (Meade, 1997). The metaphor of a script (as used in plays for different audiences) has been used by some theorists to explain appropriateness: "...the script defines roles we play in various human scenes. Other's expectations of us are fulfilled through communication. Failure to meet these expectations affects the evaluation others make of us" (Kelley, Phillips, and Keaton, 1995, p.10).

Appropriateness involves choices a communicator makes for a particular audience. For instance, it may be appropriate to talk about certain topics among close friends but the same topics may be very inappropriate in front of strangers. It may also be appropriate to use a particular style of communicating in one culture but not in another. An appropriate communicator would demonstrate an understanding of differences in communication behaviors as well as topic and language choices across cultures (Carbol, 1986). For example, some gestures in the United States have a socially acceptable meaning but do not carry the same nor acceptable meaning in other cultures. Some organizational or delivery styles would be appropriate in one culture but not the next. In the U.S., for instance, direct communication (getting to the point) is generally more acceptable than it would be when speaking to a Japanese audience.

Language choice is also a part of appropriateness. In some settings, for example, slang or particular "in-group" jargon is appropriate for the audience. However, the same language spoken in another group may not be appropriate. The term "code switching" is

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sometimes used when considering the appropriateness of language in a given communication situation. When a communicator code switches or uses different communication strategies appropriate for different audiences, that person is demonstrating an understanding and awareness of appropriate behavior for a particular situation (Infante, et al, 1993).. Examples of appropriateness indicators from communication assessment literature include: ability to adapt verbal expressions for a particular audience (Illinois State Department of Education, 1989); adapts speech to informal and formal situations (Hawaii Department of Education, 1987); and is familiar with normal constraints and conditions within settings (Arter, 1992). Appropriateness is relationship dependent and is also related to effectiveness.

Effectiveness involves reaching and achieving communication goals appropriate for the situation and the needs of those involved (Hugenberg and Yoder, 1994; Keyton, 1986; McCroskey, 1985). Effectiveness is the accomplishment of outcomes which achieves the purpose and goals of the speaker, occasion, and common goals of the audience (Spitzberg, 1983). Effectiveness may involve verbal and nonverbal communication choices related to the purpose and goals of the interaction such as: sufficient development of ideas (content); organization of ideas; and appropriateness of ideas for the purpose. Effectiveness may also involve nonverbal aspects such as delivery or actual presentation of self and ideas. According to McCroskey, effectiveness involves making communication choices and using communication behaviors that serve the purpose and goals of the situation (1985).

Another trait view of communication which applies to effective communication is referred to as communication apprehension (Duran, 1982; McCroskey, 1985; McCroskey

and Richmond, 1991; Rubin and Graham, 1986). Earlier research by Rubin (1985) suggests a negative relationship between communication apprehension and communication competence. To the degree a communicator is apprehensive about interacting with others, their competence or effectiveness would decrease. With oral presentations for example, a very apprehensive speaker may lose their train of thought, may not speak audibly, or may use a number of speech utterances which may be perceived as ineffective. An interactional component of effectiveness as suggested by Duran (1982) argues that a competent communicator does not act or communicate in such a way as to create anxiety in others. The communicator who is composed, however, may decrease discomfort or tension in the audience and therefore be perceived as more competent. One of the indicators frequently mentioned in assessment literature and related to apprehension considers whether or not a communicator presents with confidence (e.g., limited adaptive gestures, good eye contact, strong voice, etc.) Other indicators suggested in communication assessment literature related to effectiveness include: recognizing the goals and purpose of a situation and responding appropriately (Goulden, 1995); communicating ideas clearly and effectively, and developing and organizing ideas effectively (Washington State Department of Education, 1997).

As suggested by a review of current literature, communication competence involves interrelated affective, cognitive, and behavioral domains of learning. Also interrelated are the identifiable characteristics of competence which include both relational and content aspects of communication. To be effective, a communicator must understand what will be effective and appropriate and also modify their own behavior (and possibly attitudes) in the process of communicating. The communicator must also be able to

select, develop, organize, and present appropriate and effective content (ideas) within the constraints of different situations.

A PROPOSED FRAMEWORK FOR ASESSMENT

This review of literature pertaining to communication assessment and communication competency has revealed that while there may be a lack of consistency overall, there are common areas of agreement among some communication scholars with regard to universal characteristics of communication competence. Though communication assessment practices used in various school districts have lacked consistency, some consistent indicators of communication competency also can also be identified across approaches.

As stated previously, those competencies typically identified by various school districts are ones summarized by the NCA in 1994 which include a demonstrated ability to: communicate effectively across contexts and situations; effectively use verbal and nonverbal behavior to communicate meaning; use critical thinking skills in the communication process; communicate with a purpose; and effectively participate through communication as a member of society beyond the classroom.

The proposed framework (see Table 1) is consistent with the NCA criteria and is based on the six-trait writing model created by V. Spandel of Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) and a group of teachers from the Beaverton, Oregon School District (1984). It is also consistent with the six strategies of reading assessment developed by L. Thompson of NWREL (1997).

Table I : C.R.E.A.T.E. Framework

C.R.E.A.T.E.
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

COMMUNICATION IS TRANSACTIONAL – WE ARE SIMULTANEOUSLY BOTH SENDERS AND RECEIVERS. WE CO-C.R.E.A.T.E MEANING WITH OTHERS. COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IS BOTH CONTENT AND RELATIONSHIP; THE WAY IN WHICH THE CONTENT AND RELATIONSHIP ARE NEGOTIATED IS DEPENDENT UPON CONTEXT.

THE THREE TRAITS OF COMPETENT COMMUNICATION IDENTIFIED IN THIS MODEL INCLUDE: EFFECTIVENESS, APPROPRIATENESS, AND RESPONSIVENESS. EACH COMMUNICATION TRAIT HAS BOTH A VERBAL AND NONVERBAL DIMENSION.

	EFFECTIVENESS:	**APPROPRIATENESS:**	**RESONSIVENESS:** (*TRANSACTIONAL EFFECT*)
	Purpose, organization, content, goals, outcome-oriented.	Across situations – does not violate rules, norms, etc. Different "codes" used in different situations / cultures / contexts; needs, interests of audience / group identified; Is able to reduce communication uncertainty by analyzing situations and responding appropriately; shows respect for message, audience, and self.	W/I. Situation – responds with behavioral flexibility to verbal / nonverbal feedback. (communication process is mutually negotiated and adjusted on an ongoing basis)
VERBAL CONTENT: How ideas are chosen, developed, used, and organized.	Ideas organized in way that meets goals of situation, ideas clear and supported with examples, facts, experience, etc. Language choices reflect the attitude, feelings, or "voice" of the communicator.	Chooses support, examples to express ideas as relates to audience; demonstrates by content an awareness of audience demographics - SES, age, ethnicity, gender, etc. not offensive; may involve "code-switching."	Ideas can be expanded, clarified, or modified based on verbal / and or nonverbal interaction w/ others. Reinforcing verbal listening responses such as paraphrasing or restating are used when responding to questions. Active engagement in the communication process is expressed through ongoing verbal behaviors.
NONVERBAL RELATIONSHIP: "Voice" in relationship to others as expressed through nonverbal channels (delivery and communication behavior)	Nonverbal communication and style compliments rather than distracts from purpose. Delivery or interaction is natural and confident. A desire to communicate is demonstrated through nonverbal expression (vocal tone, physical displays, etc.).	Rules and norms for language and communication behavior include common courtesies such as turn-taking, paying attention to the person talking, not interrupting, etc. Clothing choices and style of communication demonstrate respect for the audience, occasion, and setting.	Rapport-building; speeds up or slows down speech; maintains eye contact; modifies communication, given feedback. Active nonverbal listening behaviors are demonstrated while others are talking such as leaning forward, facing the person talking, using eye contact, nodding, etc.

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Embedded in the framework is the familiar trait language such as *ideas, organization, content, voice, language, rules (conventions)* etc. It also shares some similarities to an eight- trait model for communication developed by the Kansas State Communication Association (1993-1994). The similarities involve: (1) the same basic identifiable characteristics for assessment of communication competence; (2) an integration of speaking and listening assessments within contexts; and an assessment of audience awareness and sensitivity. The Kansas model divides eight traits into two contexts – a group context and an oral presentation context. The traits for the group context are as follows: *listens actively; participates effectively, demonstrates an awareness of and sensitivity to conversational partners; and demonstrates an awareness and a concern for accomplishing group goals and tasks.* The traits of the oral presentation contexts are as follows: *uses appropriate language; demonstrates an appropriate presentational / delivery style; develops effective content; demonstrates adaptation to the specific audience* (Goulden, 1995). Each of the traits identified in the Kansas model or also a part of the proposed model. However, the emphasis and organizing scheme is different.

The primary differences between the Kansas model and the proposed one are: (1) the Kansas model is context-specific – the proposed framework is both context-specific and global; (2) inherent in the proposed framework is an emphasis on the interrelated nature of the trait dimensions; and (3) the proposed model places greater emphasis on the transactional nature of communication as an approach to assessment.

To assess competence using the proposed framework would place an emphasis on the student's ability (regardless of context) to demonstrate an awareness of the dynamic nature of the communication process – a process that requires an awareness of the

audience, feedback, and choices for behavioral change within any communication situation. From this perspective, the transactional communicator is both the sender and receiver of verbal and nonverbal messages. Thus, both the content and structure of communication as well as a demonstrated awareness of the communicator's relationship to the audience within the communication situation could theoretically be assessed using this framework.

The assessment of communication content and the communication relationship within different communication contexts and situations could be identified through the interrelated characteristics presented by communication scholars which include: effectiveness, appropriateness, and "behavioral flexibility" (referred to as "responsiveness" in this paper). For example, the content (ideas) shared by a communicator would be assessed for their effectiveness, appropriateness, and responsiveness as indicated by audience feedback. The demonstrated relationship (nonverbal "voice") of the communicator would be identified by the effectiveness of delivery, the appropriateness of language, and the responsiveness (or flexibility) of communication behaviors as indicated by audience feedback.

This particular assessment framework should capture areas of: knowledge such as knowing how to develop and organize ideas for a specific purpose and audience; attitude or affect such as the way in which the communicator expresses (delivers) ideas and feelings through nonverbal channels including tone of voice, gestures, eye contact, vocal variation, etc.; and actual performance in areas of demonstrated effectiveness, appropriateness, and flexibility based on audience feedback and interaction. These objectives are consistent with communication assessment literature and 1996 NCA

guidelines for oral communication assessment.

Assessment criteria proposed by the NCA also suggests sensitivity to the race, class, and gender of students being assessed. The proposed framework takes into consideration student differences by emphasizing "appropriateness" of communication topics, language, and codes within different contexts and situations. Recognizing "appropriateness" of communication is a part of competent intercultural (including class and gender) communication (Devito, 1994). In that assessments can be tools for learning (Arter, 1996), making explicit the need for appropriate communication should have instructional benefit for intercultural communication. As it is predicted that nearly 40% of all students will be students of color by the year 2010 (Milhouse, 1995), an emphasis on cultural awareness and appropriateness as a learning tool will become increasingly more important as an aspect of communication competence.

Again, viewing assessment as an instrument of learning (Arter, 1996), the proposed framework with its emphasis on interactive communication requires a demonstration of critical thinking – one of the necessary abilities students must develop to "become independent thinkers who can solve real-life problems" (Washington State Department of Education, 1997). Focusing on the interactive nature of communication requires listeners and speakers to critically analyze, interpret, explain, and engage in self-regulation in various communication situations and contexts – all of which involve critical thinking (Facione and Facione, 1994; Garside, 1996)

While a demonstration of critical thinking would be required using this framework, the same framework could also be used to foster critical thinking by providing a language to metacommunicate about the learning process (Devito, 1994). As a conceptual

framework, students are able to identify a language to talk about their experiences with communication and are more likely to transfer the learning beyond the immediate communication situation (Calfee, 1991; Fogarty and McTighe, 1993; Meyers and Lytle, 1986). Rather than trying to remember a list of behaviors or skills that might vary depending on the situation, the learner is able to ask: (1) are my ideas (content) effective, appropriate for the situation, and responsive (or flexible) if feedback suggests a need; and (2)is my "voice" (relationship) effective in conveying my ideas and relating to the audience, appropriate for a particular audience; and flexible or responsive enough to accommodate the communication style of my audience? Within this conceptual framework, the learner is then able to recognize specific behavioral skills indicating competence in each of the "trait" areas.

With transferability of learning and with the intention of general usefulness for various stakeholders (teachers, students, administrators, parents) in mind, the labels used for the interrelated "traits" or characteristics of communication competence were manipulated to form an easy-to-remember word: C.R.E.A.T.E.— Content, Relationship, Effectiveness, Appropriateness, and Transactional Effect (Responsiveness). This particular acronym is not random; rather, it is consistent with the widely accepted understanding of the communication *process* as one where meaning is co-*created* (Devito, 1994; Hugenberg and Yoder, 1994; Infante, et al., 1993).

General indicators for each trait in the C.R.E.A.T.E. framework have been drawn from a synthesis of literature related to speaking and listening including literature discussing assessments in different contexts (e.g., group, oral, interpersonal, and intercultural). Though this framework and related categories are grounded in communication literature, its usefulness for the development of an assessment rubric and

its generalizability across contexts is yet to be determined. Further, while it may be useful in establishing a global understanding of communication competence across contexts, assessment of specific communication contexts will have different specific indicators in terms of what would constitute competence. For instance, content effectiveness in the context of an oral presentation might include the use of organizational structure strategies such as sign-posting or clearly stating the main purpose of a presentation; whereas in group communication, content effectiveness related to organizational structure strategies would emphasize order and sequencing of ideas. Both contexts indicate organizational structure, but they would be demonstrated in different ways. As noted by Judy Arter (1989) "communication competence cannot be assessed outside the context in which it occurs because what may be effective in one context may not be effective in another" (p.40).

In essence, this framework has two basic dimensions – the verbal *Content* and the nonverbal *Relationship* —with three "traits" related to both dimensions, *Effectiveness, Appropriateness,* and *Responsiveness* (transactional effect). If this framework were applied to group communication, *turn-taking* might be one of the indicators listed under Appropriateness; whereas, if the context was public speaking, the turn taking rule would not apply. However, as a speaker, another rule might apply such as *speaking within set time limits*. Thus, as a general indicator, following appropriate rules can apply to any communication context. Specific indicators, however, will vary depending on context (See Tables II and III for context-specific applications).

Table II: Applying the C.R.E.A.T.E. Assessment Framework to a Speaking Context

Oral Presentation.	**EFFECTIVENESS:** Purpose, organization, content, goals, outcome-oriented.	**APPROPRIATENESS :** Shows awareness of rules / norms in different situations.	**RESPONSIVENESS:** *(TRANSACTIONAL EFFECT)* Responds with behavioral flexibility to verbal / nonverbal feedback.
VERBAL CONTENT: How ideas are chosen, developed, used, and organized.	Main point(s) support the purpose of the presentation (i.e.; informative, persuasive, entertaining, etc.). Varied materials support the main point(s) such as: examples; descriptions; personal experience; stories; facts; statistics; visual aids; credible expert testimony; etc. New ideas or insights are offered. Facts are distinguished from opinions. Language / word choices are vivid and fresh — trite phrases are avoided. Language choices reflect the attitudes, feelings or "voice" of the presenter. Unfamiliar words and concepts are defined when necessary to use them. An identifiable structure is developed including: a clear opening; main points; supporting points; transitions and sign posts where needed; a summary; and a concluding statement. An effective organizational pattern is used such as problem / solution; list; topical; chronological, etc. to support purpose.	Topic selected is particularly appropriate for the audience, occasion, and setting. Ideas presented are linked to the needs, interests, and background of the audience. Connections may be made with the audience such as making references to common experiences, etc. Humor, if used, is appropriate and reflects sensitivity toward all audience members. Supporting materials (such as descriptions, stories, etc.) are free from race, class, gender, or other biases and are appropriate for the audience, occasion and setting. Language is at an appropriate level of sophistication for the audience. Inclusive language is used. Biased language is avoided. Standard English is used as appropriate (however, presenter may also demonstrate "code-switching" —using different language forms for different audiences as appropriate).	Material keeps audience engaged or is modified (as a response to audience verbal or nonverbal feedback) to re-engage audience or to clarify material when necessary. Adjustments to the amount of material are made should the amount of time available for the presentation change immediately before or during delivery. Reinforcing verbal listening responses such as paraphrasing or restating are used when asked questions. Appropriate responses are made to any questions asked from the audience— responses are relevant to the questions asked and to the overall purpose of the presentation.
NONVERBAL RELATIONSHIP	Volume is effective for presentation —presenter speaks loudly enough to be heard. Variation of volume, rate, and vocal expression demonstrated where useful in enhancing effectiveness. Delivery sounds fluid and natural. Clear articulation and pronunciation used. Filler words (ums and uhs) are limited. Energy and vocal emphasis express "voice" or personal conviction or interest toward topic. Gestures and facial expressions compliment and reinforce verbal message. Eye contact is sustained with audience members. Posture and movements seem natural. Clothing enhances credibility and effectively reinforces the message.	An awareness of the rules, norms, and social courtesies within a particular communication environment is demonstrated by appropriate behaviors. Delivery adjusts to environmental factors such as room size, equipment, etc. Adjustments in environment may be managed by the presenter (seating, equipment, etc.) to create the best possible communication situation. Clothing reflects appropriate consideration for audience, occasion, and setting. Style of delivery (formal, casual, animated, etc.) is appropriate for audience, occasion, and setting.	Nonverbal aspects of delivery reflect an ongoing responsiveness to audience reactions (e.g., eye contact may be used to re-engage an audience member; energy level of the presenter may ebb and flow with audience energy; presenter may lean forward to share a confidence and the audience may lean toward the presenter; if the audience responds with clapping, laughter, etc., the presenter registers an appropriate response and resumes presentation after the audience response). Nonverbal behaviors of presenter / speaker may be "mirrored" to some degree. Rate or volume of speech may be adjusted on an ongoing basis, depending on audience reactions to delivery. Reinforcing nonverbal listening responses (such as nodding, leaning forward, or using eye contact, etc.) are demonstrated when receiving questions.

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Table III: Applying the C.R.E.A.T.E. Assessment Framework to a Group Context.

GROUP	EFFECTIVENESS: Purpose, organization, content, goals, outcome-oriented.	APPROPRIATENESS: Across situations – does not violate rules, norms, etc. Different "codes" used in different situations / cultures / contexts; needs, interests of group identified.	RESPONSIVENESS: (TRANSACTIONAL EFFECT): Within situation – responds with behavioral flexibility to verbal / nonverbal feedback (communication process is mutually negotiated and adjusted on an ongoing basis).
VERBAL CONTENT: How ideas are chosen, developed, used, and organized.	Ideas make a contribution to the group purpose or organizing "intention." Contributions to the group are supported by facts, examples, analogies, statistics, personal experience, etc. New ideas and insights are shared. Facts are explicitly distinguished from opinions. Language and word choices are concrete and familiar to other group members. Language choices reflect the attitudes, feelings, or "voice" of the group member. Unfamiliar language or concepts are defined or clearly explained. Member contributions are presented in a logically sequenced manner as appropriate—member may present ideas in a less sequential manner if the group membership leans toward polychronic (nonlinear) as opposed to monochronic processing (linear, sequential) discussions. Member contributions are concise.	Ideas and their support are particularly appropriate for the group membership as well as the group purpose. Language used is concrete, free of bias, inclusive, and appropriate for the sophistication level of the group. Language used is socially appropriate (member avoids remarks which would offend others). member also uses language that is familiar to other group members. Group member may demonstrate "code-switching" when interacting with different groups. Responses to others are courteous and tactful—words chosen reflect an appreciation and valuing of other members.	Contributions may build on or link with contributions made by other members. Explains relationships among ideas shared by other group members. Summarizes what has been said by collective group members. Paraphrases or restates what individuals have said when seeking clarification. Offers evaluative comments about discussion or decisions. Asks for information and opinions; asks clarifying questions. Respectfully questions contradictions. Focuses on and recognizes differences between ideas —critiques ideas, not individuals. Asks for feedback when nonverbal behaviors from others indicate it is needed. For example, "did I explain that clearly?" Encourages other members with praise or reinforces their ideas. Mediates various differences between group members. Tries to resolve conflicts among ideas. Draws others into the discussion; does not allow group members to exclude people.
NONVERBAL RELATIONSHIP: How verbal and nonverbal communication (language and oral expression) are used to "voice" ideas in relation and awareness to a particular audience.	Volume is loud enough to be heard. Conversation is fluid and natural. Limited filler words are used. Ideas are expressed with confidence (as indicated by tone, fluency, vocal projection, willingness to communicate, etc.). Energy and vocal emphasis express "voice." Clear articulation and pronunciation are used. Facial expressions are consistent with verbal contributions. Eye contact is maintained with other group members (as culturally appropriate).	An awareness of the rules, norms, and social courtesies within a particular communication environment is demonstrated by appropriate behaviors. Appropriate turn taking behaviors are demonstrated such as not interrupting others or dominating the discussion. Interaction tone / communication style reflects the group tone / style. Environmental factors may be managed by the whole group or individual group members prior to meeting (considerations may include noise level and other distractions, purpose of discussion or ways in which environment may encourage or constrain communication).	Active nonverbal listening behaviors are demonstrated while others are talking such as: leaning forward, taking notes (as appropriate); facing the speaker, etc.). Facial expressions are sued to convey interest or questions. Nodding or expressing support through facial expressions may be used to encourage or respond to other participants. Eye contact is directed toward all members rather than a select few. May assist process by keeping a record of the proceedings such as group ideas, decisions, etc.

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By comparing Tables II and III, the global traits of Effectiveness, Appropriateness, and Responsiveness can easily be applied within communication contexts. The value of this approach for the classroom is that it provides a relatively simple "thinking frame" for making the communication process explicit by providing a common language for discussion, assessment, and self-directed learning.

CONCLUSION

The primary purpose of this paper was to provide a synthesis of literature related to communication competency and assessment. This synthesis has revealed that pieces of the communication competency puzzle are scattered all across the communication field. Some pieces fit together, others do not. Having reviewed a broad sampling of communication literature, it can be said with some confidence that no one in the field has *the* picture on the box – the ultimate guiding framework for assessing communication competency. The proposed framework is *an* approach; given what has been agreed upon in the communication field and considering the foundational work at NWREL using a trait approach for writing and reading assessments, the C.R.E.A.T.E. framework appears to have at least some face validity.

Initial reviews of this framework by other communication scholars and professionals has been constructive and encouraging. The results of a small pilot test where this model was used with some high school students has also been encouraging. However, this model is still in the early stages of development; its real usefulness can only be determined by refining it, getting feedback from others in the field, and testing it for validity and reliability. A

number of pilot projects have been planned to further test this model in the field. Two areas in particular that will be explored further include applications for "at-risk" students and applications for the development of critical thinking.

Oral communication as a discipline is complex, dynamic, and not well understood. A lot of assumptions have been made about the "automatic" nature of speaking and listening. Yet as speech communication continues to become recognized as a distinct discipline, appropriate tools can be developed and used to assess skill development, to guide instruction, and to equip students for self-directed learning. Providing students with the tools to develop competent communication skills as life-long learners and critical thinkers is a worthy, yet challenging goal. Unlike writing or reading, learners do not have a unifying text to mediate their development in the area of oral communication. Optimally, a conceptual framework, such as the one proposed, can be found a useful tool in fostering skill development and learning for a lifetime.

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